

once, with my sister, but could not stay until the end. Believe it or not, there might have been a hundred people in the room, by God! The chairs were set right close to one another, and then suddenly the lights went out! I closed my eyes and prayed. If somebody hits you on the head in the darkness, you may see him again in the other world.”

Filipov, somewhat embarrassed, interrupted his wife. “Don’t think she is a coward. . . .”

But she kept on. “Have you ever seen a railroad? Even traveled on one? Weren’t you afraid? Just when we were leaving the theater with my sister, there came a train on the trestle. Real people in the cars, and they laughed as if they did not worry a bit! You know they teach the actors to ride in a train, to jump into fire, and what else. I would never, never learn such tricks.”

Filipov interrupted again. “This comes from living in the wilderness. Last winter I left for Ayan and she was alone in the house when a bear tried to get the frozen meat on the porch. She just picked up the gun, opened the door, and shot him on the threshold. There’s his pelt.”

He pointed to a huge bear rug on the floor. The lady of the house dropped her eyes modestly and mumbled, “Who speaks of bears? What could a bear do to me?”

I measured the rug and the lady with my eyes and decided that the bear had had no chance against her.

Next morning we crossed the shallow Maya in a birch-bark canoe, leading our horse by the bridle. It took time to pack our equipment and provisions. The sun was high and the air full of mosquitoes when we started on the trail. The route, no more than a footpath in many places, ran from one hill to another, with marshes and streams in the valleys and barren rocks on the crests. My map proved reasonably accurate, but I improved it here and there, making clearer the direction of each valley and introducing new landmarks. Thus I marked the double peak of Kivagi left of the trail on the third day of our journey.

That day we noticed a tiny box on an old tree leaning over the trail. I climbed up and examined the object—two boards about six by nine inches bound together by a strip of leather, and between them three pieces of black, bloodstained hide. A Tungus is a fearless hunter and does not hesitate to attack a bear with an ax or a knife if he has no gun at hand, but he believes that the angry spirit of a slain bear may dog him the rest of his life, scaring game away or calling on other bears to avenge it. The hunter therefore leaves the nose and paws of the animal he kills in the forest, to mollify his spirit.

The next day we noticed that grass on the trail was crushed, as if somebody had been there before us. A little further, in the mud of the bank of a creek, we found the imprint of a heavy, broad paw. A bear! The animal had halted at the creek, milled around, and resumed his